

## **Scream Into the Void (and you might hear echoes) by DigitalMoriarty**

**Category:** Justice League (2017), Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** (Loki/Valkyrie is a glorious trashfire), All Steve's Kids Really, And Dilton Doiley, Barry Allen is a Nerd, Diana Prince shows up, Like Jughead Jones, M/M, Mentions of a whole lot of characters, Not very kind to Nancy Wheeler, Past Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler, Pure Vent Fic, Steve is the best babysitter, That Scene Messed Me Up, Valkyrie and Loki show up, crackship

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**Relationships:** Steve Harrington/Barry Allen

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**Summary:**

Steve Harrington had loved Nancy Wheeler with all his heart. And when she shatters it, he's the one who gets to try and put it back together. Luckily, he's got a bit of help in that department.

# 1. Sorrow Leads To Stranger Things

## Author's Note:

In which the author has recently suffered personal problems, a scene in a TV show brings up bad memories and several thousand words of fic are written to try and work through it. Also, Steve has the best kids and I come up with strange crackships. Hopefully people enjoy it.

He's hurting and hiding because he can't avoid them otherwise and he's going to fall behind and he's not smart enough to afford that but he doesn't have anyone to bring him homework or whatever and officially he's 'sick' and his parents, off in some other country, have informed the school of that at least.

He's locked the door and he's wrapped up in blankets and he doesn't even know why he has this magazine (yes he does. he knows exactly why. Mike had tagged along with Nancy and left it there but thinking about her makes everything hurt all over again) but there's some sort of... pen-friend whatever ad in it. A mailing list.

And he is lonely.

He knows his old friends weren't really friends but they were all he'd had, other than Nancy and he thought maybe Jonathan was sort of a friend once removed but... nope. Turns out he's all alone in this big house and he's desperate to not be achingly alone (just aching in general) and... well, he sends a letter. Because it might be stupid and lame and all of that but he's desperate. It's that or go back to his old friends and he's not that desperate yet. He'd realized things and he can't *unrealize* them.

And he's still hiding, two weeks later (He's got a nasty flu officially) and the school finally assigned someone to bring him his work, and he's gotten letters.

And one... one is interesting. Well. They're all interesting. All nice people, nice kids but one... his name is Barry. He's from a town not too far away and he happily dumps all manner of things about himself into his letter and... And Steve writes back. He's been writing back to all of them, but this one he really writes back to. Asks about things and shares things and... and it's thanks to Barry he goes back to school. (he knows it's stupid, to have been so hurt. But he'd loved her so much and had thought it had meant something, killing the monster together, trying to be a better person, wanting to make things up to Jonathan and he had been alone without her, without them.)

He'd lasted a week before hiding, a week of seeing them and hurting and people telling him (how had they found out?) that Nancy loved him when she... she had thought they were pretending. Had somehow forgotten he loved her before all this mess had started. And then Carol had found him, and told him with a sickly sweet smile on her face that Jonathan and Nancy had slept together the day after she'd dumped Steve and wasn't that nice of her?

Steve hadn't come to school the next day, just holed up in his house with static on the radio.

And now he's back and holding on by his fingernails but he's not going to be weak he's not going to cry he's not going to reveal that he's been hiding for weeks because he got dumped.

And he writes Barry a letter every day and it's a month (a month of hurting and trying to pretend they don't exist and making friends with the kids because they understand and telling Barry when Nancy had tried to talk to him, tried to say she loved him that she hadn't meant to hurt him really she hadn't and maybe her and Steve and Jonathan could- and he'd remembered what Barry had told him, that he deserved better than that treatment, deserved more than her silence and her sleeping with Jonathan right after and deserved

better than all this pain and he wasn't weak for hurting, it just meant he'd felt something, that he'd loved her and he hadn't given in to his desire to have things back the way they were. Because they hadn't been the way he thought they were. Not if she'd thought he was somehow pretending.) before Barry asks if he could visit, maybe go to a movie, because they only live a couple hours away from each other?

And he says yes. Of course he says yes. Because he wants to meet this guy who's sort of become his best friend (his best friend his own age, who he hasn't adopted like some sort of weird mother hen, but the boys don't mind, they think he's awesome and have forgiven him his flaws and invite him over for their game nights) and it's just bad timing that Nancy's cornered him again, doesn't seem to realize what she'd done to him at the same time Barry drives up in his beloved Cavalier (Steve's heard about it, that Barry had named it 'Flash' and Hal teased him about it but that's because Hal was jealous that his stupid Citation wasn't anywhere near as pretty).

"Steve? You okay?"

And he hadn't imagined what Barry's voice would sound like and it's... warm and he wants to hear it tell him all the things his letters tell him. And Nancy nearly gives herself whiplash turning to look at him. And Barry's a lot better looking than Steve thought he would be, tall and lean (A runner. He loves running, especially sprinting) and black hair and brown eyes and even Steve can tell his lashes are long and pretty and that half the girls in Hawkins High would kill for his cheekbones and he looks concerned. For Steve.

"Yeah. Yeah Barry I'm fine. You wanna go to the diner before we hit the movie theater?"

"Sure! Movie food's always super expensive and you know me."

And it feels good to hear those words and know that he does know Barry. That he's always hungry and always ready to go for a run and just as ready to spend seven hours playing D&D.

And Nancy tries to grab his arm, to say something, but Barry's eyes and Barry's smile, small and awkward and a bit shy, give him the

strength to shrug off her hand and ignore her words and head to the passenger side, where Barry's darted around to open the door with a ridiculously over exaggerated bow that shouldn't be as endearing as it is.

## 2. You Don't Always Get More Chances

It's taken her ages to get Steve alone and she's trying to explain. To get the words out about her and Jonathan and the three of them. And Steve cuts her off, and his voice isn't angry it's just... tired.

"No. I gave you your chance Nancy. You could have just explained to me but you didn't. It's fine. I've come to terms with it. Now leave me alone Nancy. I've got to help Mike with his Dungeons and Dragons game. I'm playing their druid and I wanted to show him the new figurines I painted for them."

"I love you Steve you have-"

"I don't have to do anything Nancy. I asked you. I asked you to tell me you loved me. I didn't ask for a promise of undying devotion. I didn't even ask you to keep dating me. Just to say you loved me. And you didn't. You couldn't bring yourself to say it. And you could have said you were confused about your feelings too. And I would have understood. I still understand. I still love you Nancy. I'll always love you at least a little bit. But I don't want you to pretend to be in love with me. I don't ever want that from anyone. And I don't have to give you this explanation, but Mike would want me to, and he's a good kid. Now leave me alone Nancy. I apologized for Barb. I apologized for Jonathan. And I deserve better than this. Goodbye Nancy. I suppose I'll see you because you live here too, and I suppose I'll see Jonathan too, because I'm giving Will rides, but I don't want to talk to you. Have fun with Jonathan."

And he turns away, shrugs off her hand when she tries to catch his arm, ignores her attempts to explain. Just picks up his bag and heads downstairs. She can hear him before the door closes.

"Hey Mike, how's set up going? Brought a couple new monsters for your collection and I painted everyone new figurines. Figured since we leveled up and got new gear in that temple, we should have

updates."

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

A bit short but -shrug-. Anyway, welcome to Steve Harrington the Not So Closet D&D Nerd (which can be firmly blamed on his kids but hey a place where sports strategies are absolutely useful!)

### 3. Infestation

She infests his mind.

That's the proper word for it.

She's unwelcome, unwanted, unceasingly creeping into where she isn't wanted. Memories of things she'd said, promises she'd make, things she'd done... It's always lurking, always waiting, sneaking into places in his brain he thought were safe.

And it is all tainted. All of it. It is tainted by her words and her actions and the pain, the heartbreak.

He fills his days as much as he can (there is only so much time he can fill, only so much he can do before persistent exhaustion forces him to his bed) but it's not enough.

It can't ever be enough.

He pours his love into the kids, into being the best babysitter he can be, into being a good big brother, a good friend. Taking an interest in their interests, educating himself as much as he can (reading their rather confusing D&D books, slogging through Lord of the Rings and the Hobbit, but determined to give them an almost-adult who can be trusted to always care).

And there's Barry, whose letters are always a bright point in his days.

He learns more for Barry too, who loves sci fi and obscure music (apparently he can play viola). Because of Barry he reads Tiptree and



Asimov and Zelazny and things like Neuromancer and God Game and The Forge of God. ...and ends up listening to chamber music.

But it doesn't seem to be enough.

She's still there, memories slithering out to cover things in a film of once upon a time.

There doesn't seem to be a way to scrub her away. Barry does his best, Barry talks with him about running and sports and books and friends and the future.

But always always always he can feel the haunting thoughts wrapping him up. He is done with her, even if he can't seem to pry the love for her from his heart, but that doesn't mean she's gone.

Even ignoring that he sees her regularly, because it's a small high school and a small town, he had loved her and even if she shattered his heart ("Pretending?") and he is left to put it back together, that doesn't stop the sharp edges from cutting deep.

He just wants to be free of her.

But he won't be. Can't be. Until he has patched himself together again, until he has put the memories of her into the grave they belong in, until he has made peace with himself (and he has tried, he has tried).

It's like trying to deal with termites or ants or wasps. Infestations take time to be free of. And sometimes the only thing you can do after they are gone is to replace things completely.

## 4. Sometimes Other People Should Shut Up

People kept telling him, that he should consider her feelings. Her thoughts. Her reasons. That he should be understanding. See things from her perspective. To see how *she* was hurting.

The same people who'd been so certain that she'd come back to him tomorrow or the next day or the next day. That she really loved him and would say it. Any day now. Even with all the evidence to the contrary.

He didn't *want* to consider her feelings. Her thoughts. Her reasons.

He didn't *want* to be understanding.

He didn't *want* to see things from her perspective.

He didn't *want* to see how she was hurting.

He *wanted* to yell at them "Why didn't she think about my feelings?"

He *wanted* to yell at them "Why didn't she see how *I* was hurting?"

He didn't though. Because Steve Harrington was trying to be a better person.

Was trying to be a good role model for the kids.

Was trying to cope with putting himself back together and mending his heart and putting Nancy *behind* him.

Of course, the first time Barry found out about those people he'd

pitched a very un-Barry like fit.

"Seriously? *Seriously?! Why are you the one who's supposed to be doing that? For fucks sake she hasn't even properly apologized for the shit she pulled. After you risked your life for her! And let's not forget the whole 'couldn't even bother to wait a couple days' because I am still pissed about that okay.*"

And it felt good, to have someone so angry on his behalf (he was still having trouble finding his anger, buried as it was under mountains of sadness). He couldn't yell, but Barry could. And he did, pacing back and forth in the yard, waving his hands and in the end wrapping around Steve and grumbling about people needing to be beaten with pillows until they are sad.

"Sometimes the other person's everything *doesn't* matter. And you don't have to forgive them unless it's what *you* want to do. Stop smiling at me like that Steve, I'm trying to be angry and you're making me want to kiss you."

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Sorry this one was so short. Something happened last night that made my brain... grumpy. So I wrote more vent fic (and shoved it into where it would probably fall in the flow of things. Most of the other stuff was written maybe a month ago?) and the happy bits at least were inspired by how my datemate reacted to things.

## 5. Slipping

"Hey Mike, wanna do something?"

"Can't, sorry. Steve's taking us to see that new sci-fi movie. Then we're going to his place for D&D. We're starting a new campaign and he's our GM. He picked up all the books."

Nancy blinked and before she could say anything, there was a knock on the door and there was Steve. And he doesn't even look at her, just grins at Mike and gives him a fistbump and ruffles his hair.

"C'mon man, we gotta snag Lucas still. You ready for an awesome night?"

"Hell yeah! I can't wait to see our figurines!"

"What makes you think I painted you brats new figurines?"

"You're not fooling anyone Steve. We all know how much you like painting us figurines. We remember you and Will's mom working together to get him a custom set of all the classes so he can play whatever he wants."

And Nancy suddenly has the feeling that she's... slipped. That Steve never said anything to Mike, would never say anything to Mike but... But Mike still sort of knew. And still had sort of chosen. And hadn't picked her.

### Notes for the Chapter:

I am... less than kind to Nancy...

## 6. Pokers Are Good For Many Things

"No."

Steve had come over to pick up Will for some sort of Epic Movie Night and indoor camping D&D session thing and Jonathan had tried to talk to him. And it wasn't that Steve's eyes were hard. He wasn't angry. He was just waiting for Will to hunt down the last of his source books before they left.

"I haven't even said what I want to talk to you about."

"It's about Nancy. I know it's about Nancy. And I'm not talking about Nancy."

"She loves you."

"That's nice for her. I waited for three weeks for her to tell me that. I had five people tell me they were certain she loved me and she'd say it any day now. And do you know what happened? She didn't say that. She hooked up with you. And don't get me wrong, you're a cool guy. You're Will's older brother and I did kill a monster with you. But that's not an 'I love you Steve'. I had my angst, I had my crying, and I had my getting over it. Have fun with Nancy Jonathan. I'm sure she'll let you take pictures of her in the woods again. I've got better things to do than pine."

And Jonathan's about to say something, because Nancy gave him a list of things to say, but he can't get any of it out. Because Will's there with his backpack and his beaming smile and it's directed firmly at Steve.

"C'mon buddy, we've got players to mess with."

"This is going to be so awesome. I mean, I'm pretty sure Lucas knows it's coming but he's good about not meta-ing and I can't wait to see their faces when they see the new miniature."

"It better be awe, given how long I spent painting it."

"Bye Jonathan, I'll be back tomorrow afternoon!"

And with that Will and Steve are gone, happily talking about stats and experience and loot distribution.

And he hadn't gotten a single thing on the list Nancy had given him checked off and Will's never told him half the things Steve already seems to know.

"How're the nightmares?"

"Getting better. That stuff you gave me helped. And the poker."

"It's an excellent monster killing weapon, according to Susan Sto Helit."

"Thanks Steve."

"Tell me if they get bad again, okay? We'll take the gang and go check the forest again for you."

And he hears that through the open window and... he's not sure what he's supposed to tell Nancy tonight.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

A. I know the Hogfather wasn't written in the 80's but it's one of my favorite books so I don't care.

B. Barry isn't mentioned by name. But he's part of the reason Steve's getting over it. And he's the one who told Steve about Discworld.

C. The stuff in question that Steve gave Will (along with the Fireplace Poker of Monster Smiting) is lavender.

## 7. Adoptions

"Eleven's back?"

"Yeah!"

Mike was practically glowing, and although she hadn't seen much of her brother lately, Nancy's heart hurt to see him so happy.

"Steve went and found her. I don't even know how he did it, just one day he told us he'd have to miss a couple sessions and gave us some money so we could get ourselves ice cream and then he left. And when he came back he had Eleven with them and a bunch of Eggos. She's staying at his house now while Hopper's getting a room ready for her. He's teaching her how to swim and play D&D and cook. I hope she learns to make that Asian thing Steve makes whenever one of us has a cold. That stuff is awesome."

And... she hadn't known... any of that.

"He said we shouldn't go into the woods for a couple weeks too. He thinks something's trying to come through, because Will's nightmares got super bad. His mom's even letting him stay over at Steve's place because Will feels safer there. But he promised as soon as he knows and as soon as he's dealt with it, he's going to help us build an even better fort."

"Well... that's all cool."

"I know. I'm heading over there in a couple hours. Steve's letting us play in the pool and then play video games."

"Video games?"

"Yeah, he got a new system too, because he saw Dustin looking at the Nintendo magazine and Dustin's birthday's coming up."

And she can't help but feel... that Steve's adopted these kids. Made them his. ...Would have made Jonathan and Nancy his, if she'd given

him the chance. But instead he pours his attention and affection and formerly buried mother hen instincts onto five kids and their weird friend.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

In which I joyfully fuck with canon to obtain catharsis for my own feelings. As an aside, the Asian thing is a Vietnamese noodle dish called pho.



## 8. When All You Can Do Is Nothing At All

"Who's that with Steve?"

Nancy looked up from her book and stared. Steve was laughing with a taller, dark haired man. Lean muscled and smiling and obviously a jock from the letter jacket to the slicked back hair. And he didn't go to their school, Nancy knew that. Those weren't their colors.

"Oh, his name's Barry. He's really nice. He plays D&D too. And he's got books for a whole bunch of other stuff. We're going to try some of it out tonight."

Jonathan and Nancy both turned to see Will, who gave them one of his little smiles.

"Steve met him through this fanzine list thing. He's visiting from somewhere up north. He says next time he comes to Hawkins he's going to bring his cousin Dilton and Dilton's friend Jughead because they're awesome DMs. Jonathan, Mom said I could stay over at Steve's house tonight, and that you should pick me up at noon tomorrow."

And she's only half listening because the other guy, who's only an inch or so taller, is moving into Steve's space, is cupping his face and giving him a kiss.

Is pulling back a little to whisper something that makes Steve collapse into him laughing and smacking him in the shoulder.

And Steve... doesn't notice them, sitting ten feet away. Or doesn't care. Is putting his focus on Barry who he met through a fanzine thing. And his focus stays there, at least until Dustin appears and calls out "Steve! We need your help lifting the next piece up!" and

then he's grinning and calling back "Be right there."

"Might as well put those muscles to work."

"Hey, I'm a runner, not a weightlifter."

"I'm sure you'll manage."

And all she can think is how good he looks right now, golden from the sun and smiling and how she loves him and how the last time she'd tried to say that he'd told her, calm as can be "I'm sorry Nancy. But I'm not going to say it back. You must know what that's like." and then headed downstairs to where Mike and his friends were about to delve into some dungeon or fight some dragon.

And Will's heading over and Steve drops to one knee and Will clambers up onto his back. And Steve gives him a piggyback ride over to Dustin and past him, talking with both Barry and the boys about something to do with magic. And they've gone four steps and are still in sight when Dustin says "Hey, can I have a ride too?"

"Well, I'm playing steed to Will right now, but Barry..."

"Sure, I carry my cousin Wally around all the time. Up you go buddy."

And it hurts.

Especially when talk turns from magic to monsters and how very real they are as they move out of earshot.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Oh look, Barry's back.

## 9. Friendships and Parties

She doesn't mean to listen in. It's just there's a party and she and Jonathan are there and so is Barry and his cousin and his 'friend' and she and Jonathan are sitting in their own little area and holding hands and she's... not sure Steve even knows they're here because Mike was the one who'd let slip about the party and Steve had left the door open...

"So, what are you guys doing this summer?"

"I'm helping out at a scout camp for a couple weeks and then Juggie and I are taking a coast to coast road trip."

"Can't blame a couple of guys for wanting uninterrupted makeouts. It's been eons since I got alone time with my boyfriend."

"I caught you two kissing under the bleachers four days ago."

"Exactly. Eons."

And they're bantering back and forth, easy friendship and a voice whispers 'That could have been you. He'd have understood. He'd have loved Jonathan. He'd have loved you.' and then she sees Barry (who runs track and loves science and computers and who she knows too much about thanks to Mike) creep his hand over, tangle his fingers with Steve's. Sees Steve smile, sweet and slow.

Hears, quiet and under the noise of the party.

"Love you Stevie."

"Love you too Barry-bear."

"Oh god, you two are sickening."

"Shut up Forsythe. I had to deal with you and Dilton after he won the science fair. You wrote him a poem and recited it and made him a book full of stories about the Adventures of Doctor Turing."

Jughead, whose actual name was apparently Forsythe, rolled his eyes

and clearly contemplated shoving Barry into the pool they were sitting by before finally saying "You're just jealous you have to drive two hours to see your boyfriend and I have to walk five minutes."

"Stop snickering Dilton, or I'll start telling your boyfriend about what you did at the family reunion when you were six."

"Don't you *dare* Barry!"

And Steve looks so happy, so content as he laughs at their banter, at Jughead's snark and Dilton's occasional very nerdy interjections or familial outrage and Barry's bad jokes. And he and Barry keep giving each other adoring looks. The sort of looks she recognizes, because Steve used to turn those eyes on her.

And she's lost, in a tangle of emotions that she isn't sure how to process, when she hears "Oh, you must be Steve's ex."

And Dilton is a tiny guy, big eyes and big glasses and a bird like tilt to his head as he asks "Is that your new boyfriend? Steve mentioned he's a photographer. Do you want to talk to Jughead? He likes taking photographs sometimes."

The last is directed at Jonathan, like he doesn't seem to notice this supposed to be awkward.

He's Steve's current boyfriend's cousin talking to Steve's ex and her new boyfriend and he's talking about his boyfriend's camera specs and preferred darkroom techniques and the things he's experimenting with (and isn't that weird, that they do go by 'friends' sometimes, but everyone they're really close to knows what they are. Steve knows what they are, and is a good enough friend to be trusted with that, and to keep their secret) and seemingly not even needing to breathe as he talks and talks.

"Let the nice people get a word in edgewise Dilton."

And Jughead (what sort of name is that anyway?) is a lot taller, coming up behind Dilton and putting a hand on his back. And Dilton blushes and rubs the back of his head, explains that he rambles sometimes. And he leans back into his boyfriend and he still doesn't seem to realize this is supposed to be awkward. Jughead clearly does, and just as clearly has filed it under "things I don't give a fuck about".

"If you want to talk to photography, we'll be in the guest room. We're not really party people, but Barry bribed us."

"We don't want to interrupt-"

"Oh we wouldn't do anything unseemly at a friend's house. I've got a very interesting new chemistry textbook and Juggie's working on his novel. We just like places that are quieter and don't have so many people."

And then they're gone and she's back to staring at Steve and Barry and the looks they keep giving each other.

And Jonathan's hand in hers feels so distant.

And that voice is whispering that if she had just been smarter. Had just said the words that Steve had needed so badly to hear, she would have two hands to hold. Steve would still be giving her those warm looks. She wouldn't feel like part of her has been emptied.

(She'd thought Steve would always be there. Would wait forever for her if he had to. But now there's Barry. Who says 'I love you' and who Steve believes when he says it.)

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

I have shipped Dilton/Jughead since I was 12. (And Dilton made the assumption that since Steve is

awesome, his ex must be acceptable. And also this is a town they don't live in so it's reasonably safe to be open) (Jughead's just going with it.) I am also deeply fond of silly pet names and using them to make the people around you give you Looks.

## **10. Some Words Can Hurt (and some silences break bones)**

He can still hear the words sometimes, echoing in the dark behind his eyes.

"Pretending like we're in love".

Except he was never pretending. And he can hear his own voice too, and remember what it felt like, like someone had slammed him into a wall.

"Like we're in love? You don't love me?"

And the questions had been ash in his mouth then and are hurt in his heart now.

And she hadn't said anything.

And he can hear the silence in that dark behind his eyes. Hear himself say "Nancy. Please tell me you love me?" Because he loved her so so much. He'd killed a monster for her (just for her then. He'd face another one down now, for his boys, but not then. Then it was just for Nancy).

And she... she hadn't said anything.  
Hadn't been able to bring herself to say the words.

And everyone around her reassured him that she did love him. That

she just needed some time because things had been such a mess.

"This happens sometimes, after a sudden stress. Feelings get muddled. Just give her a few days."

"Of course she loves you Steve, don't be silly."

Except... except she doesn't say it and she doesn't say it and she doesn't say it and he finds out she's dating Jonathan. Had had sex with him the night after in fact. And... and he can't hate Jonathan. He just can't. His heart won't let him even though he wants to because he loves Nancy so much. But he loves her enough to let her go and if Jonathan is who she wants... well... he's not Jonathan, now is he?

"Hey Stevie, no brooding now, that's Forsythe's job."

"Call me Forsythe again I dare you."

"Dilton calls you Forsythe."

"Dilton's better in bed than you are. Roll your dice Barry and tell me how badly this monster's going to kick your ass."

And... and then the words are gone and Nancy is gone and Jonathan is gone.

He's in Barry's garage, with Barry's cousin and that cousin's boyfriend and their friends Hal and Diana and Bruce and Clark. They're play testing something new Dilton and Jughead have been working on, and if it goes well with this group, he's going to test it out with his kids because they're all so smart and Lucas'll be able to find the flaws and Dustin will find out the awesome bits and Mike would look at it from a Dungeon Master's perspective and Will would offer suggestions.

Barry is holding his hand and so obviously means it when he says 'I love you' and he says it several times a day, whenever they see each other and when they go on dates and when they're on the phone and in his letters.



Barry had made everyone groan and laugh when he'd handed Steve his character sheet and announced "We're married" like it was the most natural thing ever.

Barry thinks he's brave and wonderful and amazing and not a perfect person but someone who tries and learns from his mistakes and always wants him to be better.

Barry is not Nancy.

And Barry knows he can still hear the words in the dark behind his eyes, and is trying to give him new words, better words, to drown them out.

## 11. With Friends Like These

He has no fucking clue why they're all in Hawkins. Oh, he knows why Barry is there, he and Barry see each other as often as they can. And sometimes Dilton and Jughead (who are, as far as he can tell, both incredibly weird and almost joined at the hip) if he's helping the gang with their game.

But this is not just Barry and Dilton and Jughead.

There's Hal and Bruce and Clark and Diana and Cheryl and Claudia and Booth and Ratty and even Arthur and his girlfriend Mara. This is six cars and Cheryl hopping out of Diana's convertible and looking around and announcing "Dear holy fuck how did a town this low rent produce a guy like Steve? Can we leave Diana, I think it might be contagious."

"Awww, I dunno Cheryl, it's got a small town charm."

"Shut up Hal. Our town has small town charm. It is picturesque. This is just a place they put on the map to avoid the embarrassment of too much forest in one place."

"C'mon Cheryl, stop tearing things apart and be nice. This is Steve's town after all."

"Probably has a low crime rate. Apart from the monster thing."

That's Clark who wants people to get along and Bruce, who knows way too much about criminal matters and Arthur is smirking and Booth is looking nervous but Booth almost always looks nervous and Jughead is... He knows that look.

That's the "Jughead is about to start something and then step back to

avoid the consequences." look.

But he can't do anything about it because they're all out of the cars and Jughead is saying "Oh look, here's the town welcome wagon. Are they bringing cookies?"

And every last one of them is turning, all 13 people who are firmly On Steve's Side. Because Barry had gotten the story out of him because Steve had warned him and Diana's easy to talk to and Cheryl's a force of nature and Bruce is like a detective in a book when it comes to ferreting out secrets and Claudia had just looked at him and known and he'd told Arthur after five miles of running and three beers. And between them it had spread through the friend group until everyone knew and even if he couldn't really even be upset, they absolutely could be.

And there's Nancy and Jonathan.

He'd killed a monster with them. He'd thought that meant something. He'd thought she loved him, maybe not as much as he loved her but at least a little. And she'd said it, eventually, but long after it had mattered. When it didn't matter anymore and there was only hurt and sorrow and tremulous 'I loved you so much' where once love and adoration had been. She wanted Jonathan. The fact that she couldn't even tell him that (didn't trust him didn't care didn't think it was real despite everything didn't believe he was sorry and trying to change and wished more than anything he could bring Barb back for her...)

And he hadn't even seen Barry move, he's just next to Steve all of a sudden, fingers twining with his and he's seen that look on Cheryl's face twice and neither time had gone well and he wants to say something but he doesn't get a chance.

"Oh look it's... Nina? Narcissa? Something. How's the new model treating you? Heard you took him for a test drive the day after you

traded in the old one. That's fast, even for me. I'm sure all the other members of your monster killing squad were just so proud of you for your communication skills. And don't give me that look Mr. Likes To Watch. You're outnumbered and unlike Stevie-boy, Bruce, Arthur, Clark and Diana all know how to throw a punch. I'm sure it's very gallant but you better be careful. We both know what Nicole there does to boys who want to love her and keep her safe. Now, I was told there was a diner around this place and I want actual food before the Boy Scout drags us into the woods for a camping better just be a weekend."

"...Camping weekend?"

"Wanted to surprise you and everyone decide to tag along because... well they do that sometimes."

Everyone's turned and Jughead is leading them to the diner (because he remembers how to get to anywhere with good food) and everyone is ignoring anything Nancy or Jonathan is trying to say and just pulling Steve along, so he doesn't even hear it over the good natured bickering, Clark and Hal chiming in that they're both Boy Scouts, although Clark's actually an Eagle Scout and Cheryl threatening dire consequences if she chips a nail and Diana laughing at her girlfriend since they all know it's half for show.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

References to the rest of the Justice League, Archie Comics and The Bone Key. Also, Cheryl is awful and I love her. (Also, semi-mentions of another crackship. Specifically, Cheryl/Diana)

## 12. Kissing

He'd thought it'd be weird, kissing a guy. It's certainly different than kissing girls (kissing Nancy) but not *weird*. Barry's mouth tastes like the chocolate ice cream he'd been eating and his body is lean and well muscled and feels good against Steve's as he presses close. He's taller than Nancy was, and his hands in Steve's hair, his skin under Steve's hands, the obvious evidence that he is A. a guy and B. really into kissing Steve... It's good. He doesn't want it to stop, he just wants more, wants to hold Barry close and let those broad shoulders help him carry his burdens, wants to find out all the ways two guys can make each other feel good, wants to know if Barry likes the same touches he does.

For now he's got kissing, Barry pulling away to nuzzle and nip at his neck. He's got "I love you Steve" in his ear and hands sliding down, arms wrapping around to hold him closer. He's got Barry who loves him and who doesn't blame him and who wouldn't rather be with someone else, who isn't thinking about anyone else when they kiss.

### 13. Gifts of Gold

He wears it because Barry gets it for him.

Because Barry says the beads match his eyes "Honey gold and pretty lashes" which leads to him informing Barry that he is not the one with pretty lashes and that leads to Barry grinning and "Awww Steve, you think I'm pretty?" and then a makeout on the couch and Steve wearing the bracelet.

The kids think it looks awesome, like some sort of magical item his druid would pick up and thankfully most of his fellow students don't care, at least until Tommy H notices and decides to mock him for wearing jewelry, even though like half the guys on the football team wear paracord bracelets.

He didn't stop wearing it though. Because Barry gave it to him and he kissed the inside of his wrist and told him he didn't have to wear it, he'd just wanted Steve to have it, because he'd seen it and immediately thought of him. And Steve would do a lot for that shy little smile.

(Barry's friends tease him too, but it's all wondering what Barry's going to get him next, and teasing Barry about wanting to be Steve's sugar daddy and maybe he should get Steve a fancy baseball bat?)

(...they're probably his friends too, but after Nancy and Jonathan he's nervous there)

And it's not the only thing Barry ends up getting him. Ends up presenting to Steve with that shy little smile and that 'You don't have to wear it. I just want you to have it. I saw it and thought of you'.

Ends up kissing neck and wrists and behind his ear.

He couldn't care less about what the other students think, when he's got the warm glow of 'Barry loves me' settling into a place in his heart, taking over all the places Nancy had once been and flooding into places Nancy had never touched. When the kids think it all looks cool and Barry's friends (his friends) only tease him about how much Barry loves him.

## 14. Ghost Stories in the Dark

"Oh fuck."

There was something that obviously should *not* be there clambering toward them, some weird lizard-horse monster and she *doesn't have a gun* it's just her and Jonathan and-

There was the sharp crack of a gun. Several guns in fact. And the monster topples backward with a shriek, three arrows bristling in its chest and holes in its head and torso.

She turns, and there's Steve with his baseball bat, and his boyfriend with a compound bow and half his new friends holding guns and Mike and Will and their friends peering around them.

"We were having a camping night and Will and Eleven said something came through. Nothing's messing with my kids." Steve's tone is firm and in control and that doesn't explain why everyone is well armed except it does.

"All good Will?"

"All good Steve."

"All good Eleven?"

"All good Steve."

"Awesome. Let's get back to our ghost stories and hot jello then. Pretty sure it's Lucas's turn."

And they're turning and leaving and then Will says "Can Jonathan and Nancy come with us? They can leave after s'mores."

And there's a pause.

A long pause.



Like the pause after "Please tell me you love me Nancy."

And then "Sure Will, if you want and the guys agree. We've got plenty of supplies."

"You're just going to have s'mores after that."

"Yeah Jonathan. Because it's dead and the resumption of normalcy after an event like that helps kids bounce back."

"Also because s'mores are really yummy and all Steve's friends are armed. Like, even Jughead and he runs away at the first sign of danger."

"Because I am intelligent thank you very much Mike."

And they're back at the camp, which is... a lot nicer than usual, probably because Cheryl is sitting on a pillow filing her nails.

"Oh look, it's Nadia and her boy toy. Pull up a campfire, wouldn't want you getting colder than you already are."

" *Cheryl.* "

"Fine fine Diana, I'll be nice to Nadine."

And she feels it, that these are not her friends. These are Steve's friends. ...It doesn't help that as soon as Barry sits down, he pulls Steve into his lap and all the kids giggle, like it's normal and something they tease them about and the way everyone sits means they're as far from Steve as possible.

"Here you go Naomi, s'mores made with gourmet marshmallows, Belgian chocolate and homemade graham crackers."

"My name is Nancy."

"I'm sure it is Nessa. Now eat your s'more. Here's one for Mr Peeping Tom too."

And then they're... largely ignored, ghost stories resuming and hot jello being passed around and very pointed looks once s'mores are

done.

"Here, have a flashlight. Scream if anything tries to eat you."

The tall, broad man she thinks is named Arthur hands her a flashlight, gives her a flash of teeth that can't really be called a smile and then he turns back to Lucas, demanding to know how he'd come up with his ghost story because he was like nine and kids weren't supposed to be that capable of coming up with scary things, while Max snickers.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Max likes Cheryl's cattiness and Lucas tells the best ghost stories. And Will is too nice for anyone's good. (Also, hot jello is very good.) Oh. And Barry having a compound bow is a psuedo-reference to We Need To Talk About Kevin (although Kevin wields a recurve). I'm not sure if Nancy would recognize one right off the bat but I also don't care.

## **15. New Friends Are... Wonderful?**

He's over in De Camber (DC according to all the residents) visiting Barry when he meets them.

Diana's coming out of lacrosse practice and she's got Mara on one side and a girl he's never met before on the other and she sees them and she beams (because Diana is really one of the most wonderful people on the planet).

"Hey Steve! You haven't gotten to meet Val yet, have you?"

And the woman, who's got warm brown skin and a sharp smile, offers him her hand.

"Valerie Gailsdotter. Valkyrie on the field, Val to my friends. I just transferred in. So did my boyfriend actually, but he's a mess and currently being a troll in the art room and engaging in dramatics because we got to the high school too late for him to be the lead in the play, so you won't meet Loki until he chills the fuck down."

"I AM NOT DRAMATIC VALERIE I AM ARTISTIC!"

"SHUT UP AND PAINT YOUR AVANTE GARDE BULLSHIT LOKI!"

"BITE ME!"

"NOT UNTIL YOU STOP BEING THE MOST DRAMATIC DIVA ON THE PLANET!"

And there's incoherent (but still audible) grumbles and Valerie turns back to him like she hadn't just been having a yelled conversation with someone who's probably her boyfriend through like two walls at least.

"He's a dick and occasionally incredibly annoying and ridiculously over-dramatic and addicted to attention and his entire family is a train wreck ,apart from his uncle Heimdall, who's awesome. But I love him anyway."

"He plays a lot of pranks." Barry offers and Valerie rolls her eyes. "Yeah, he's a troll. But it's mostly because he likes the attention. He can be an absolute sweetheart when he wants to be and he's always there for his friends, even if he pretends he hates everyone. Although I've heard you play pranks too Barry."

"I am an absolute angel thank you. Just ask Steve! Steve, tell them I'm an angel."

"Barry's an absolute angel. Just like Lucifer."

And this is the sort of banter he loves, as Barry makes an offended noise and Mara and Diana and Valerie all laugh.

Barry wraps him up in a hug a moment later though, and asks "So, Val, going to join our little gaming group? Loki might like it."

"I've heard about your gaming group. No one smart wants Loki around kids. They might pick up his habits."

"...he smokes?"

"He pisses off a hell of a lot of people and he's an expert at wiggling himself into power and he's generally a mess of a human being. Bad habits."

Steve just sort of blinks because he doesn't know what to say to that. But he's saved by Barry, who just chirps "We can figure that out later. In the meantime, I have a boyfriend to take to the movies. Later ladies!"

"Don't do anything I wouldn't do Barry."

"That's not narrowing things down much Mara!"

## **Notes for the Chapter:**

Loki/Valkyrie are not quite a crackship and more of

WTFship. I've got more stories about them, but I'll shove them into their own set of stories.